POETRY QUARTERLY

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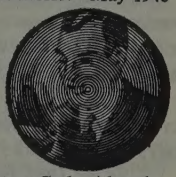

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EDITORIAL

To write a poem at all in these days is no mean achievement. But, for the young poet without a widely-known name, to publish it is almost impossible. When he or she looks round for an editor who might be sympathetic enough to consider his work seriously it is more and more apparent that the circle of possible magazines which print poems is narrowing. Like a scorpion the poet may see himself ringed round with the fire of the philistine. Many people will say that we are only back in the thirties when slumps made publication difficult. We seem to remember though that Mr. Day Lewis and others had a hope for poetry. Periodicals published good work, Mr. Grigson devastated the stodgy with new verse by poets who have since become famous. Today there are no such healthy signs. The weeklies print poems which seem to have been chosen by literary aunts complete with bee in bonnet, the B.B.C. wonders why poetry is not popular like Itma. The few surviving serious platforms for the young poet are full up for several issues ahead.

Messrs. Faber & Faber have just published a book by Robert Graves called *The White Goddess* at the scandalous price of 30s., which is a reflection not on the business methods of Messrs. Faber & Faber, but on the high cost of production of good books and the very few people left in this country who are willing to buy them. It is a pity that it is so expensive, because everybody who aspires to the name of poet should buy it, even if he has to go without an evening among the expensive ruins of London. For poets of this generation this book may be what Frazer's *Golden Bough* was for those of an earlier generation. It tells him a lot about the poet's position in society in the past, so much more favourable in Wales or ancient Ireland, so unfortunate in England where he describes himself as almost anything else, a journalist, a schoolmaster, a novelist for example, anything but just a poet. All the same, Mr. Graves admits that no generation of Englishmen since the twelfth century has been entirely faithless to poetry. He says: 'Nevertheless many English poets have written with exquisite technique and skill'. It is impossible to do justice to so important a book in these few cursory words. We shall return to it in a more detailed review. The Night Mare is one of the cruellest aspects of *The White Goddess*. The poet should turn to Mr. Graves for consolation and encouragement.

JAMES KIRKUP

Alarippu

For Ram Gopal

Stillness, turning on itself,
shall make its idle rhythms flow
into the silent dancer with the still
unawakened face and soundless thighs,
whose arms from liquid shoulders now begin to wave
in wide and wider estuaries of profound
deliverance, the graves of immobility.

Each gesture slides a chiming
bracelet on a golden limb of air.
Charmed by their own bright magic, warm
necklaces of cold become a tree that burns
its foliage to jewels, or the stamen-heavy
flower-eyes, gold birds enchanted into leaf,
or winged hands that sing in sleeves of sun.

The bold feet and burnished ankles thread
their shadowed labyrinths. The music treads
the silken snows of space that sweet vines
have garlanded with bells and humming bees.
Roots deep as dance and breathing share
the beating heart of earth and stone,
discover eagle radiance in the wells

of crystal dark; and set the flower free to die
in brilliant fingers, spirited upon a stem of air.

WARREN WIRTZ

Mission to Neuilly

To J. A.

Sea is for sorrow fashioned of a rock
  To shade what joy goes skipping on the shore,
  And shadowed you along the Mediterranean
As thoughtless ocean robbed you, robs us daily.

Thus on its velvet pillow jewelled across
  A wild green ocean one word illuminates
  Your six-year dim. I cannot doubt how much
You loved him scaling natural Europe's walls,
  Lolling under parasol and palm
  Where now I see you casual forever
And proved conspirators in printed pose.

But little accrues to photographs which cast
  No moving shadow in the drawer's grooved
  And safe obscurity save spiders' deft
Improvisations on the circumstances
Of our final failure, and oh alas!
  I fear this gem that I have cherished for you
  Over broth and brine is seaweed paste
All glassily unstrung and pleasure-brief.

How then shall I presume to irrigate
  Your desiccated soul which glistens for
  One moment on the stove's green porcelain,
Of lentheric one fillip, then vaporizes
  Out across the fired Parisian forest?
  Where should I find you nightingale with spring
And deep Algerian night with fig and song?

For I shall move no oceans for your safe
  Return, not even rock's grey umbrage; am one
  More apt to tumble a string of dominoes,
Go apprehensively in ships, fear waves.

Yet waters wash us clean, more clear and clean
Than bubbles on your emerald liqueur
And snow the chamois hunter clambers up
To seize his velvet prize, and they shall flood
The nest-clogged gutters of your memory,
Which I would see at last in just release
Expiring into the precious pebbled sea.

Poem after Melville

I. OLYMPUS AND THE DRAGON SLAYERS

Be sure of this, O young ambition,
all mortal greatness is but disease.
MOBY DICK

Hermes Trismegistus, hilltop tall,
Him with bulging brow, immortal probably,
Speak from your Michaelangelic cloud and say
How mortal man may go so sick and great
And great and sick, shaking stem and flower
To annotate the drunken petals' fall,
Splintering iceberg at the sheeted pole
And bristling mountainous with teeth of saw,
Fanatic, plangent and gadfly-fleeing bull;

Why anger rides the fiercest of them all
And melancholy bears another down
And down from the crest of the vertigo where one
Is great and sad and all are sick and tall.

Like Herman great, like Ludwig fierce and Martin
Sad: India-rubber men rebound
In geometric time and with finesse
Defy the Grecian bed and rise to slay
The monsters screaming where the cliffs divide.

All greatness is disease, be sure of this,
Young passion growing in the laughing woods,
Which feeds on mortal hand and heart and love
In lamplit gloom and leaves as trophy on

The mantle mollusk's shell and silky pod
Some butterfly has flown. Here are bones
Dried in the furnace of the alchemist,
Dry bones that contemplate a vast Sahara;
Here wounds more deep than soldiers bring from wars
With trembling hand and bleeding heart and love.

Stand in the heat of their terrible flame, pray
And tremble for their incandescent sorrow.
Then pass from out the phosphorescent gaze,
For I would see you looming brave and simple
In the summer day and hear your voices
Ringing multitudinous in grottoes
Deep and green like those of noisy birds
That gather on the lawn to flaunt their bold
Impieties. And I would have you tempt
A tetrapetalous omen from the sod
And under the sun, and luck to lead you from
The deep crevasse, through gay and echolalic
Laughter, to one long melodious love.

ALAN ROSS

A Lament for the 'Thirties' Poets

They who for us *were*, who became
Forgers of language, makers
Of the right and truly romantic
Gesture (knowing it in vain)
Have lost their disillusions, the same
World going by them without pain.

Let us not, ten years later, now
Have to admit we were wrong,
Our disillusioners mere fakers
Of unruffled and pedantic songs, who oblivious
And outgrowing history, grow silent to us—
Their world and their words subsiding like flat champagne.

Awakening

The impulses of love are words
struggling through touch to be heard.

The pale sun flows between our dreams
filtering the room with light it seems
to shadow like a sleep. The separateness
we keep in dreams, the lost nightmare
and the passion drift, as now we become aware

of sunlight breaking on the eyes in surf;
the blind fingers, sensitive as moles in earth,
rehearse the memory of darkness and the tense
unfolding of the limbs are senses stretched
to the dumb corners of the rescued room.

On your mouth now sleep is a leaf
turning in the vase of a drained grief:
the eyes grow deep in their own shadow.

Behind the scenery of dreams, I touch
your body's still parabola; the streams
of light achieve diagonals of space
in the shade, where your head is laid.

Slowly the travelled landscape is withdrawn
as now again the body is reborn
into a sense of time, and feels
upon the surfaces of flesh the real
encroachment of the day
that this or any hour can never stay.

Over my hands the yellow sunlight drifts,
and into you the knowledge
of its warm and sifted touch.
The light lifts to the ceiling.

And the first word is that most often
and most longed for to be heard.

Cactus

Like orators declaiming or the grotesque
Rubbery silhouettes of boxers, the prickly
Paws fondle and miss the blue husk
Of the day, already grown hot and sickly.

Below where they puncture and point
On the smoking hills, the harbour rides
Securely under prints of coral and scent.
Boats turn over the sun on their sides.

Only the cactus hints with its nervous
Shadows that Time is, unnoticed, away
On its own—a guest without fuss
Who has left a hole in the day

By his absence, and a growing alarm
That somewhere, northward in Europe
Away from the shade of indolent palms
Absurd orators, like cacti, strangle our hope.

DEREK STANFORD

Exergue for Omega

Escape is cut; no other path remains.
The blinds of history blacken out all hope.
This the bright end towards which mankind moves:
our times are dynamited at their source.

Patience, then, pilgrim, homeless and alone,
wandering these ice-blue roads in the winter sun.
The day for pity and prophecy is done.
Nothing suffices now save high disdain.

Truth, beauty, goodness—vision's charities—
sustain you, traveller, on this fading track;
though even these like summer leaves shall wither
when life's great oak falls blasted, trunk and root.

RUTHVEN TODD

Défense d'Afficher

Défense d'afficher: the label must persist, the warning
Against assumption, the deceptiveness of words;
Yet, in this springtime Paris, with the sap returning
In vividness to all the trees along the boulevards,

I sit, recalling without pain her easy ways,
Remembering the little things that so amused,
Diverted us, making so much of our brief days,
Making them happier than ever I'd supposed

Was possible. Cummings says it better than I can:
'good-bye Betty, don't remember me'—but that
Too was about Paris. To say I could forget the sun
At intervals between the showers would not

Be true to me, or just to her who still
Persists, despite the threat. For time cannot efface
These memories, that love, though nothing may fulfil
The promises I once extorted from this place.

Even the Whale

For H. G.

Even the whale, industrious in his search
For larger pleasures in the sudsy deep,
Must surface up for air, his enquiring sweep
Half done, and in his spouting clumsy lurch
Hope that the clarity above will shew
These rosy mountains which have charms
To grant all wishes, scattering alarms,
And once submerged again perhaps will know
That there are other things besides the watery life.
So in her parted lips that tantalizing afternoon,
I saw the promise of a pleasurable strife
And dallied lovingly. Even the too soon
Sound of brusque knocking on the door
Could not leave things as they had been before.

Muguet Porte Bonheur

This windy morning of the first of May
When iron-toed feet are castinets on cobbles,
The lily-of-the-valley tattered and awry
Will bring in happiness and banish troubles:

Twenty francs insures one's future luck;
In four days, too, the lottery will be drawn—
'*Muguet*, what is the number to give back
These things that I pursued but never won?'

'Fool', say the white bells jangled in the gust,
'Love and luck cannot nor could be bought.
Where luck lies you never would have guessed,
And love knows nothing of your gambler's doubt.'

So, though I have not twenty francs to buy
These emblematic flowers today for you,
I hope your happiness this first of May
Will be as spacious as the winds that blow

The bunches clutched by nearly all who pass.
'Please, *muguet*, give her better luck than mine,
Be gentle in your answers now and bless
The remnants of that love I will not know again.'

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Lament of a Drowned Bather

Sleep is restless on this fish-bone bed
With continuous tide tossing over
These whittled bones and this discarded boot.
O gather up my garments blooming exotically
Along the beach, stick these casual flowers
In the button hole of your mourning suit.
No tears my darling, to add to waves' confusion
But lean like Rapunzel from the gull-glazed cliff
And let your hair throw a frail rope's hope or gleam
As constant lighthouse to comfort this skeleton ship.

W. S. GRAHAM

Writer

From *A Tent for April*

He turns his deadskin memories to the day
and he dies daily writing his doom's diary
while body's queer career is his carrier
in time across a plain of life and paper.

Persisting in the dogdays of dead summer,
on the redletter days like a latterday saint,
on solemn Sundays blurred with workers' sleep
he annotates and counts the months of war.

Blood soaks the calendar in the threatened room
as cities fall on days where lovers hide
and clockwork time with its Monday monitor
alters by tearing leaves and scaring love.

Loss is by kiss, a death in the double mouth,
when railways run by homes to ruin them:
but in bare days he finds a winter's work
and swears that time, his murderer, shall talk.

The Children of Greenock

Local I'll bright my tale on, how
She rose up white on a Greenock day
Like the one first-of-all morning
On earth, and heard children singing.

She in a listening shape stood still
In a high tenement at Spring's sill
Over the street and chalked lawland
Peevered and lined and fancymanned

On a pavement of shouting galleries.
She saw them children of all cries
With everyone's name against them bled
In already the helpless world's bed.

Already above the early town
The smoky government was blown
To cover April. The local orient's
Donkeymen, winches and steel giants

Wound on the sugar docks. Clydeside,
The public fathers by the mother's bed,
Locked up the children's cries alive.
Her own red door kept its young native.

Her own window by several sights
Wept and became the shouting streets.
And her window by several sights
Adored the even louder seedbeats.

She leaned at the bright mantelbrass
Fairly a mirror of surrounding sorrows
The womblike outcome of always war
Against the wordperfect, public fanfare.

Brighter drifted upon her the sweet sun
High already over all the children
So chained and happy in Cartsburn Street
Barefoot on authority's ruined alphabet.

Her window watched the original town
Flare up in her lost kitchen. A sudden
Rich house. It watched the blind unborn
Copy book after book of unforeseen

Elements within the morning of her
Own warlocked womb. It saw the neighbour
Fear them housed in her walls of blood.
It saw two towns, but a common brood.

Her window watched the shipyards sail
Their men away. The sparrow sill
Bent grey over the struck town clocks
Striking two towns, and fed its flocks.

HOWARD SERGEANT

The Leaves of Europe

Autumn again, the leopardlike and burning
season, but with it no discovery in sky
or feather, no flicker in the lantern eyes
of berries. The word we learnt has lost its meaning.

Today the sun is impotent, either to salve
our consciousness with the touch of hands or strike
for us a fountain from the voiceless rock;
our only light an evanescence clipped
through the folds of cloud by the wild geese flying
homewards to the saltings, to the uninhibited land.
The stone lies heavy on the heart and is not now
to be moved by time or the snow-bright angel's shoulder.

Autumn again and I have seen the cold
grey fingers of death at work among the trees,
a traffic in limbs and faces, star following
fading star to the beaten grass like infants
racing out of school—but these are children
without joy or gesture, without the anarchy
of childhood:
their lips will be remembered by
the hungry breasts of Europe when the soft
wind-voices speak, and small ghosts lift their faces
in the darkness for kisses that cannot be given.
The twigs that wear the horse-shoe scars for grief
will never know their soft green flesh again.

Autumn again, and I have seen the labourers
gather on a frosty morning at the wood's bare fringes
where the furrows, rich with a memory of summer,
the bearded corn, lie easy as a woman after
travail and stretch their fingertips under
the briars, under the rough warm blankets of soil.
I have seen them burning leaves, the smoke curling
above the meadows, a flock of bewildered lambs
bursting upon the hedges and the pastures of wind.

A shepherd would know these lambs—their ears are notched
with a cross—would know the pitchmarks on their backs

Sparks aim for the heart on the crimpled air
but the leafburners have instructions, hirelings
accustomed to obey. The old men, slow-moving
and cautious, keep always to windward and lean
upon their long broomhandles when the tongues
of flame stammer into speech over the branches,
absorbing the language into their cold bones.

Now more than leaves are heaped on the smouldering fires.
Somewhere in the distance the lost music rises,
the autumn songs of children, for whom the wind
is a voice in the trees and the berries douse their light.

This is the chosen darkness,
this is the myth our fathers
and their fathers knew, and choosing
closed their eyes and ears, and gave
their willing hands to any cause
that named them heroes, that promised
no responsibility—
to plead
I am absolved; I was commanded

And this is false
to murmur
I was not there

NICHOLAS MOORE

Blandula

Confounds the actual and the fanciful,
Content with playing-cards and kings and queens,
What the fairies do and what the servants say.
T. S. ELIOT—ANIMULA

I end, ending what once I have begun,
With a picture of Mrs. Woor in an empty kitchen,
Who lives in Oak Tree Avenue, where love
Is a strange thing, and bleak chrysanthemums
Enliven the November mist to greet
My birthday and a million other birthdays.
She remarks upon the weather and sips her tea,
My mother's servant, thin, worried, familiar to me,
With whom I agree.

What is there to speak of but the weather and the garden?
What is there of comfort except in sipping tea?
Mrs. Woor also has a husband and a son
Of whom she is proud, she works hard, is always busy,
Always kindly, friendly, frightened. I'm frightened too,
Remembering the beast in the cupboard, the creak on the stairs,
And now as I read the news in the newspaper,
'Mr. Molotov says No'; the latest raper,
The latest escaper.

Always the sounds of violence hum at noon
In the heat of the sun. Tulips are early this year;
The golden and brown and black breeders,
Cool, immaculate on their tall, smooth stems,
Glowing with gold and a subtle perfection of form,
Flowers for my lady; my lady of desires.
In the chemist's shop the enormous bottles glow
With an equal perfection of colour and form, and I know
How this is sorrow–

Coloured water in bottles, dolls, flowers,
Voices speaking in the market-place,
Vendors of toys, elastic, pots, fruit,
Calling, crying. And in the garden at night
Three cats wail plaintively against the moon
Like lost souls—like my hopes—in earthly enjoyment.
And this is sorrow, this falseness, this fiction,
The ever-lasting end of unending action,
    Bathos, dereliction.

And the streets are full of ever-hopeful faces,
The Australian cricketers come, the Italian elections
Pass peacefully and without success. The hands
Chivvy papers, amass signatures. Faces
Of crowds look up, and in shuttered offices
Refined white hands sign all their hopes away.
And I am left with nothing more than a cup
Of tea; and Mrs. Woor in the kitchen is drinking hers up
    Peacefully sup by sup.

But there is more than this. In the Czech restaurant
The blind and empty come and go; the political figure
Carves his wound like a small boy on a desk.
I, too, carve a heart and initials on a tree.
A Miss Howard passes on a bicycle,
Or greets a friend with a scintillating smile.
A dog finds a new lamp-post with relief.
I end as I began without belief
    In the images of grief.

Yet here I know it is the actual day,
As the train approaches Liverpool Street,
As I recognize a face from the top of a bus,
Or at other times. A girl goes shopping for shoes.
A stranger asks the time. A hooter blows.
Familiar in these small activities,
The day awaits us all with fairies in
Its eyes; the cup of tea where tea-leaves swim,
    Where all will end or begin.

TESSA M. SILLARS

Single Vision

A DEPRECATION

In this unambiguous glare
Everything is visible, but nothing seen
Up to the limits of its contradiction.
Deviation and the partial are irritably twitched
Into the woven skein of harnessed thought.
And straightened the slanting gleam
That throws its light
In unpredictable directions
Leaving the dark of mystery incalculably heightened.

Here in the glare of unequivocal
Light that casts no redemptory shadows,
The end envisaged from the beginning,
What but the straight line of death to death progression
Following an ordered thread of causal thinking,
Eliminating elements that confuse the issue?

Multiple Vision

AN INVOCATION

Bent light, that strikes in unexpected angles,
Silvering the underside, sharpening the edges,
Catching unawares the unforeseen event,
Compromising statement with
A delicate dubiety!

Delta-fingered light, that feels the distance
And finds diversity;
Intrudes the secrets
Of strange-seldom flowers of desert growth
That cannot fructify.

Tear-splintered light, that penetrates
Where shuttered, shrouded, sheeted things
Accumulate their shadows.
(Blind fingertips that reach
And touch
The manifold
Shapes and surfaces that have no purpose, only destiny.)

Plenteous, pouring light, that lies
Warm, like love and innocence,
Stealing its way towards the seed.

Light without beginning, without end,
Reborn in the darkness of the tomb;
Reflecting itself forever
Like candles in the night-dark window-pane;
Reality and symbol contributing to make
Difference without disparity,
Contraries that contribute equally to truth.

KATHLEEN NOTT

Any Day After Judgment Day

The change took place—you could not say quite when,
A.M. or P.M. No particular date,
no season therefore, so plants and beasts and men
did not adapt their silent hues. The state
of light however was what altered first
or, since you could not say it was early or late,
its structure rather—a knowledge which like thirst
comes straight into the brain.
Light has a heart,
therefore, we suppose, might die. That was the worst.

Spaced by their needs, the people moved apart,
the shifting sifting people. Certain I am
there was no loitering for a stir to start,
these faces left unguarded were no sham,
their peace or pain came on their lymph's flow.

I think I saw a woman with a pram
lean over it toward me—or I think it now.
I did not see what was underneath the hood,
except for absolute stillness even so.
There seems no kind of reason why we should
have imagined anything new had come to pass,
I or my friends or the human multitude.
Indeed our hearts might well have been soft as grass
or dead as snow, for we heard nothing fall.
Birds in our sky we seldom see, alas,
and read their vanishing writing not at all,
the words begin elsewhere and the story is strange,
our sleep weighs down our eyelids, the script is tall,
and we choose the closing earth, to imagine change
only on ceaselessness: the foreign shoot,
thief at a darkened window, working its range,
as if with palpable tremors of the root,
to hang for our waking eyes an apple or the sun—
we have hearts to feel the growing of either fruit,
but not a visiting bird.

Did anyone
wait for its anniversary on a site?
The new that is old as we, is seen by none.
Similarly a house would startle like broken flight
could we suppose our fathers saw it begin.
But whether it stay or vanish overnight,
it has only witchlike age reminding of sin,
no other function save to outlast men all,
now living, behind a coarsely crumbling skin,
not even ivy keeps memorial.

High birds and houses can, out of a clear sky,
and do, make other space, with plummet fall.
But there was no sudden cracking of the dry,
no singing of the drawn.

Yet after thought,
it seems the first was nearest. I'll tell you why
it was universal everlasting drought
most probably fell on heart and living wood,
specially on those hearts which knew it not,
and on the unknowing tree.

For, lately, of good
as innocent as of evil, I proved one
whom the worm Love could make his livelihood
and turn my heart to powder, scattering it on,
lightly and widely, the whole world of hills,
which all had some of me and I none.

This was no kind of wish men leave in wills—
their pinch at peace and at large in the seas' whole home:
for even the mariner's poor salt when he spills
sprawling out of the burst boat down through foam,
though he were cursing and longing when he died,
is more like will that the high rout should come
all into that broken heart he dwelt inside,
bound by an iron love, than that he, being dead,
should poison bitterly the ocean wide.
For with wild helpless wings and tumbling head
his shadow-death tinged water with a stain
of warmth, which clung from any human bed
where he did once and never will again
love his own sleep and other limbs on shore.

But if I have loved, and still been loved, in vain,
then there are two of us will love no more,
so shrivels by us the great and delicate Heart—
but waiting death is grosser than before.

It may be that I witnessed such a start,
that some such crack had run across the air,
and the mute couples read themselves apart,
though it seemed one face, shadowless and bare.
And so a bitter fellowship fallen on men,
such patience in recognition in despair,
after the judgment waiting for time again.

DENYS VAL BAKER

Flowers Seeking the Sun Need Roots in the Dark Earth

You lie far from home this gentle night
Embarked on body's eternal voyage
Towards a new shore, seeking the apple
That grows profuse yet's left by virtuous blind
To fall unplucked. Being that wanderer,
Hand reaching unafraid to the high branch,
Rich dew and honey amber shall tumble
Knowledgeably into your open heart.
You shall blossom like flowers in the sun.
And I rejoice. For still, this parted night,
In sudden emptied room, yellow-shafted
And mocked at by moon's silver spinning coin,
Still you sleep softly in my sleeping arms,
Warm bed, curve pillow, breath familiar
Scents of woman's secrets. You are my peace,
Swift and sure like lapping river's tongue,
Caressing, possessing, that boat it launched
Many years ago. The long night, once feared,
Now lies stripped of all its fancy nightmares
And false ghosts. It is a time, my darling,
For looking down the avenue of life,
Tree-spaced to eternity, and seeing
Not the shadows haunting gloomy sidewalks
But the steady light at the end. And then
With cold wisdom wiser than morning tears
I know love. Hidden, yet a living thing,
Spring of the fountain, root of the flower,
Born in the one and only heart which first
Of all things human feels and knows and gives.
Without its crimson bloom the long journey
However mapped, measured, estimated,
Is purposeless.
So on this gentle night
Still you sleep safely in my lifetime bed
Are my peace, my dreams, my lover's light.

WILLIAM PORRITT

Epithalamium

This often-married heart of shedless grief
I give in new keeping. Take, O, take
What worth in it bids taking, and
I'll be faithless and true as the wind is.

Yet say wild winds are true—who give
All from the whole of their gusty love
On leaves, on fires, on seas and deep-earth ways,
Waning when heavenliness bids in them a parting.

True as the never-charted rain I'll be
Falling the days when sun said gold I give.
As all the things in nature's certainness,
Constant yet fickle, here, now not—these in me take.

Ask: why weathers and fruits from under the sky?
I'll say: brothers are dying in men my strangers;
And would to any hand groped up in need
Out of their torpor other than deathness come?

There is this need of parting, and at last will I
Make marriage that links me eager to futures
Here beginning, turning my guiltless, turnless back
On those who petrify with never life's attempt.

Taking with me time's neglected loves:
Humble, the gentle, the poor, and those from these
Believing the wrath in the righteous hand
Well-used in wars now called by these crushed qualities.

O, future from this moment, take, take
The best that drags from shuddering pasts.
Then as the oyster with its agitation
Out of the need for greatness I will build a pearl.

Time's up, and choose, or death flying fast
Will choke like snow these rutted ways of earth.
Or stay, brother, stay, in woollen sightlessness
Asking no more from we who seek life's juvenescence.

IGNACE M. INGIANNI

Private Calvaries

ruin the sky.
The rock of grief crumbles,
mud is the bread of earth,
the dry essentials, the desert of our aim.

Wide in the night the cry, as the rain
on the roof of the wind.
The last lure plays upon tears
like a black shawl
pensive with agony.

Frame of emptiness, the barren ebbtide,
where sorrow stays,
brown wind-grass on unfertile sand.

This Queer Angle

will make ghosts of us all.
Wild beat on the cliff's darkness,
shadows press on shadows,
gathering to claim the hour
in a gallery of clocks.

Dark lure of chaos, image of innocence
transmuted to the wheel of mind
whose fingers death nudge oblivion.

Down, down architecture of sound,
across the map the pace of convulsive clouds,
red murder on the folded hills
avalanching the patient infinite
in ultimate stillness.

IAN BEITH

In the Spoken Silence

Astride his young years with laughter in his limbs he cried:
Oh England crucified across city streets
Break out from the prison punctuality.
Where lift doom-daring to the sky defiant fists,
When comes the swan-drawn warrior from the mists
With test-tube miracle to drive our wheels?
The sea laps about the soul
Where lifts a head to the forgotten sky;
Break out from the whirl of world.

The echo wandered back
From the incessant turning of wheels behind tall walls
Frowning on behind-factory streets:
No, England is a clenched fist in the sea,
Whose tide is known flowing in the silent stream
Beneath her sport and beer.
Whose tide you will learn to know
In the spoken silence in the house
That is only one in a row.

BEN EDWARDS

Holiday

This cuckoo-freedom and the country air
Awakens melancholic song;
The burning streets accentuate
The distant voice of hills and lambs.

This freedom leads to sweating feet
And brows to cooler streams of truth.
As yeast rising, the soul prepares
To fling the shell of work behind.

A man surrenders feet to sun
And cherry stones are pitched in wild
Abandonment. Bunches of flowers
Are plucked and crushed with little hands.

And custom (or love) offers tokens
Of pleasure to wives, or drugs to conscience.
To hide the holes of cross and nail
A man now drops a penny in a tin.

O love now rides the bus to foreign
Lands. The mountain-side is black with lovers,
The town is full of beggars and stragglers
The streets are choking hot with hearts.

BERNARD BERGONZI

The Use of Sorrow

The use of sorrow is in tears.

Tears fill the dark wells of wonder
echoing the faint sighs of the far horizon
reflecting the quiet eyes of the pale children
in the midnight truth of calm unsighted water.

Sorrow has no use but tears.

Tears follow the lone flight of the dumb bird
through the deep planes of space.
Tears water the green plant that grows
in the grave hand of the young bride.

Without tears there is no sorrow.

THE WORLD OF GEORGE BARKER

The full value of any poet's work depends on the man inside the poet and not ultimately on the poet within the man. It is meaning and feeling, hurt, happiness and sorrow that will count longer in the end, than rhyme and rhythm and metre. If it were not for what was inside the technique and the sprung rhythm, Hopkins' fame would have not been more than the sensation of a literary season. When the leaves started to fall the absence of the branches would have been noticed. George Barker got off to a good start. His beginning was a triumph. His very earliest poems were praised by Yeats and dismissed by Mr. Geoffrey Grigson. His world is a large, generous, going concern, full of big sixpences within an expanding emotional economy. It is populated with people he has loved and crowded with those who love him. It is irrigated by friends, by his own kind and consanguinity. It is a world revolving around his own hunger, its fixed star his need to love, yet its boundaries are spread abroad between 'the Wall of China and my heart'. His world is a long row of confessional boxes where the forgiving priests are his own poems. Rarely is he refused absolution. Each new sin finds another priest. It is a world, where for all his hurry, he is very much alone. Standing sandwiched between oppressor and oppressed. It is a wide world with boundaries in many dimensions. Its first sea was the rain falling on an evicted farmer's face along a country road in County Monaghan. The vision of England and the news from Spain mix with the smell of Japan and the noise of America. The seasons don't conform to any calendar. The constitution of his republic is the language of the church, yet it is a world always in full rebellion. The man is a poet and he has made his poems out of his life. His muse knows how to forgive. His sins are his sonnets, his litany, his elegies. George Barker is, together with David Gascoyne and Dylan Thomas, one of the three major poets of that generation whose work is the central concern of this quarterly. They have actually very little in common beyond the following facts. That they are all very good. That they are poets on a larger scale than their more publicized immediate predecessors were or show any signs of ever becoming. And that their first work was published by The Parton Press. This will cause that small publishing house to be of interest to future literary generations to whom Poetry London and New Writing will convey absolutely nothing. David Gascoyne's most important work may lie in the direction of Kierkergaarde and Leon Bloy rather than in that of a poet, yet there is no body of work in modern English literature by any poet under thirty-five to compare with that of these three.

Literature is not a competition. Yet poets will invariably be compared both with their contemporaries and with their predecessors. Barker's verse is not so perfect as Dylan Thomas's, nor is his vision so intense. Yet his range is wider; his feeling not deeper, but more general. For this reason his achievement may not be so obvious. It may not even be so completely attainted. But if the daisies and the buttercups are plentiful and perfect, a rose is none the less a rose for having a thorn where the petals should be. What really makes a man a real poet, except the size of his soul, is very difficult to say. But it is as equally difficult to fail to realize it, when a writer turns out to be a real poet. George Barker is a real poet just as surely as Patric Dickinson and Maurice Lindsay are not. Criticism is really poetry once removed, for whereas poetry is the joy and the understanding of life, so criticism is the joy and the understanding of that poetry.

George Barker is much more difficult to cope with than either of the other two important poets—Dylan Thomas and David Gascoyne —of his own literary generation, whose work was to fill the decade and which started out on its journey with the label of the Parton Press. Dylan Thomas is the easiest to access. In the whole range of English poetry, from the beginning until yesterday, and here one means that it is all one whole, whether it was written by a Dublin clergyman, Dean Swift, or by a New England farmer, Robert Frost; by a Negro, Langeston Hughes, or by a white South African, Roy Campbell; by a peer of this realm, Byron, or by an insane pauper, John Clare. In English poetry, the adjective qualifies a language, not a place. No one can fully grasp the immenseness of English poetry without being conscious of Whitman, of Burns, and of Yeats. Dylan Thomas may indeed be something very small when put next to Shakespeare. But even when seen from this neighbourhood, he is something very perfect. His poems are the very zenith of that kind of verse in which George Herbert and Henry Vaughan, Thomas Treherne and John Clare excelled. It is something for our generation to have done so much so soon. While Gascoyne, who has been more ignored than the two others, as men of his kind always are, as Kirkergaarde and Leon Bloy were, as Ignazio Silone is. Yet it is easy to see where his strength lies, what the destination of his fame is to be. George Barker, however, offers the most difficulty to anyone of this generation looking at the work of their contemporaries. I am going to digress for a moment, and I believe that the three men I am talking about will join me in this digression.

For one of the features of our generation has been the presence in our midst of a large number of European exiles—not all were victims

of the Right. And among these there were those who were writers. One of them, Fred Marnau, who has lived and worked here for a decade, is the one writer in this country and of this literary generation whose work forms a part of the best of the period. A prose-poem entitled 'A Winter's Journey', which is a fragment of an exile's autobiography, is undoubtedly of a texture made familiar to the readers of the great prose of William Butler Yeats. Genius is a commercial word used by non-literary advertising men; it seems so soiled by misuse as to be almost an insult now. But Fred Marnau is a very great artist indeed, and his presence in this country has added great dignity to the generation to which he belongs.

Unlike any other poet of his generation whose work is at all mentionable in the same sentence as his, George Barker's prose is not of any great stature. It is only fair, not only to Barker, but to the readers of these notes, to point out that Edwin Muir's opinion of his prose is quite the opposite. But for one of his readers at least he must stand by his verse alone. The quantity of this is considerable for so young a poet. He has already published five books of verse: *Thirty Preliminary Poems* (The Parton Press), *Poems*, *Calamiterror*, *Lament and Triumph* and *Eros in Dogma*, all published by Faber & Faber. This year he is bringing out a new book of poems entitled *News of the World*, and an autobiography in verse entitled *The True Life of George Barker*.

His influence on poets younger than himself, notably on Tom Scott and Maurice Carpenter, has been of more use to them and more beneficial than Dylan Thomas's influence on other younger poets. This is probably because his work is more in the main stream of English poetry. Whenever one reads Barker, it is almost impossible to avoid the suggestion in one's mind of the cow who kicked over the bucket of milk it had just given. The most natural poem is sometimes spoilt by a stupid pun, like the one in the last line of his huge poem to his mother. Barker is a Byron who hasn't got a Greece. He is a knight errant without a sword, or, to be fairer, the sword is there all right but his hand is paralysed by the trouble in his heart. By this it must not be understood that he is unaware of what has taken place during the years which have contained the first half of his writing life. For the most part these happenings find no place in the work of Dylan Thomas. Gascoyne is too much of a mystic to concern himself with the results, his interest is with the causes. Barker, who has a great talent for humanity, has been left somewhat in the air, not ignoring them, but not being able either to cope with them or to assimilate them into his work. He was too much of an artist to offer

us easy slogans. Because his feelings were deeper, because simply he was more of a poet, he didn't jump on to political platforms during the 'thirties like those poets of the literary generation that immediately preceded his. After all, it took more courage for a poet of Eliot's standing to publish a book about cats than it did for an intellectual to be anti-fascist in a non-fascist country, where the whole public opinion of the circles in which he mixed was anti-fascist.

The only artists who organically belong on left-wing political platforms are those, like Maxim Gorky, Ignazio Silone and Sean O'Casey, whose work is made from the material out of which socialism itself is carved. It has been said before that his 'Elegy on Spain', dedicated to the photograph of a child killed in an air-raid on Barcelona, could just as easily have been written about a child killed by the other side. To which it is probably correct to answer that any real poem so dedicated would be able to pass through the enemy's lines. After all, it wasn't only the Republicans who enjoyed Lorca, let alone one particular brand of republican. Barker, too, seems to refute the adage that to be sexually successful is also to be spiritually poverty stricken. One prefers to think of him as an exception to prove a rule.

The great thing about the work of a true poet is the atmosphere which it creates in the mind of the reader. This is as difficult to define as it is as impossible to miss. It has a great deal to do with technique and with style, but only in so far as they are an integral part of the feeling and thinking that go to make up a poet's work. They are no use if they are superimposed on top of it. A good bad poet is more of an artist than a bad 'good' poet. Any real artist, and among them Dylan Thomas, George Barker and David Gascoyne, will agree to this, whereas most literary jobbers will not. That real poetry has enemies even in literary circles is proved by the remarks of Mr. Patric Dickinson when dismissing that body of verse which W. H. Auden could read aloud in an hour and a quarter as 'alien bits'; alien to what? Surely not to this language or to the openness in the human mind. Or by another remark of Mr. T. R. Fryel's which is an enemy to any real socialism or true culture, when he said that the West End should be the cultural shop-window of a Socialist Britain. O shades of William Shakespeare and John Ball!

Poetry is a mutual thing, it needs an audience worthy of it. Barker is not everyone's cup of tea, but it is real tea all right, brewed with a mixture of waters, the one from a young clear stream running down the side of an Irish hill, the other is the tears of the hunted and it has been stirred by the poet's own vagrant integrity that never for a

moment seems to have been tempted by the prizes of mediocrity. The size of his failures is the measure of his worth. No small writer could have made such huge mistakes. He does not belong to the fixed rows of suburban security so fashionable in some literary circles. As Eliot has recently said of Ezra Pound, Barker perpetually gives the impression that he has just packed his bag and is about to move off to another place. He is a vagrant, the only place where he is a fixture is in the poetry of this language. All the requirements of real poetry set forth in the great critical tenets of Coleridge, Walter Savage Landor and Ezra Pound are to be found, without much searching, in his verse. Many kinds of men have written true poems, a king and a thief, a Jesuit and an Irish pagan, rebels and radicals, peers and Victorian gentry, but no man has written real poetry and no man ever will (the word 'man' in this context is of both genders) who has not seen the sun stop the earth for an instant on its journey, that it might shine more brightly on truth, on honesty and justice. He may not have built a small, tidy bungalow, but he has already laid the foundations of a huge edifice. His is the carelessness of greatness. He has the sure confidence of a true artist, meaning he is confident about the right things. He is steeped in his craft. He has worked as only a man of enormous vision is capable of working. He may have stopped dead, but he has never wandered off into the alleyways of easy fame or polite flattery. He is a victim as any proper writer must always be. Yet he can never escape giving the impression of being in control of his own misfortune. In this he is unlike most of his contemporaries, who are as much of an artist as he is.

The literary historian, if not the critic of poetry, will be interested to note that the principal poets of the generation immediately preceding Barker's were all upper middle-class, public school and Cambridge or Oxford men. Whereas Thomas, Barker and Gascoyne all finished their schooling somewhere inside the curriculum of various suburban secondary schools. It is also of great interest to note the deep courtesy, real chivalry, and true human dignity, not the dignity that is merely the cellophane wrapping around a five-cent cigar, expressed by them, both in their behaviour and in their writings. When Thomas or Barker write a poem to a girl, that poem is of its very nature the kind of poem that any man could read to any woman. Compare this, for instance, to the work of two of their contemporaries who were educated at major public schools and senior universities, who in their poems addressed to women and frequently dedicated to them by name, give their readers a geographical survey of that lady's physical charms, whose verse is, in

fact, a publicized Cook's tour of their women's bodies. Poets used to carry fire in their hands; these writers only pack contraceptives in their cliches. This far has a class fallen. The work of these three poets is a proof, beyond all questions of politics, that the courtesy and good taste of the race now only exists for the most part in other places than among our governing and privileged and educated classes. No important poet under thirty-five has been to a senior university, no real poet of our generation is what a film script-writer would call a gentleman.

Barker is almost as completely unpolitical as it is possible for a contemporary to be. Yet, like Byron, he goes far beyond the conventional poetic subjects for his material. He is neither as mystical as David Gascoyne nor as religious as Dylan Thomas. The things that worry a politically-concerned person often trouble him. Yet the trouble does not lead to revolt, much less to a desire for power. He wants to understand, sometimes to escape. He identifies himself with such varied forerunners as St. John the Divine and François Villon. He is capable of spoiling a good poem by a noisy line, but never of trying to make one out of any emotion that is not an integral part of his own deep feeling. If Gascoyne gives to his readers the impression of a great chef trying to make a feast out of a badly stocked larder, Barker leaves them with the feeling of an ordinary man who is very hungry trying to cook a meal in the kitchen of a king. George Barker is among the outstanding poets of his generation. That company consists of Thomas and Gascoyne, and the Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh. He may have achieved least, but he has certainly suggested more; for a man of his age this is part of his achievement. To travel with George Barker is not to arrive, but it is to be very excited about the destination. He may leave one unsatisfied, but he has created a hunger that no one else has even suggested.

The world of George Barker is a place for sinners. It is not a street of barricades, nor is it a house where one prays. Yet the nature of the poetry in him is the plentifulness of forgiveness. He is original without being unique. He is very much of this world, in so far as it is a vale of tears, without being seduced by worldliness. His technique is in advance of his maturity. He is married to poetry; he is not having an affair with brightly-coloured words. But he is still waiting for the cock to crow whereas, according to the calendar of his achievement, he should be getting ready for the gift of tongues. If the work of the first half of his writing life can serve as a measuring instrument for the second, he will have proved that Yeats was a good judge of those who were about to begin as he himself was coming to

his own great finish. Yet as nearly all creative artists only have about fifteen years or so during which they are capable of reaching to the allotted heights of their own most intense creation, this may not be his half-way house, it may well be only the front-door. Whatever verse, however, his muse may have in reserve for him, and he for the steadily increasing number of his readers, that poetry which he has already written, punctuating as it does his unplanned and wandering journey, prove beyond mere praise that he has embarrassed this language and these years with

The tremendous gentleness of a poet's kiss.

PAUL POTTS

GEORGE SEFERIS, *The King of Asine* (Lehmann, 7s. 6d); LAURIE LEE, *The Voyage of Magellan* (Lehmann, 10s. 6d).

Seferis, the senior poet of modern Greece, is already known in England if only in the influence he has exerted over writers like Durrell. Reading him in translation, I do not think that the quality of his work is missed in the journey from Greek to English. Although he is well translated here, in any translation the merit of the imagery at least would be unmistakable. Moreover, he does not develop into a pidgin-phraseology which will be copied: one of the troubles with Lorca's influence was the readiness with which one could write Lorca-translation-pastiche; with Seferis that cannot happen. The translators (including Durrell himself) deserve great credit. One of Lehmann's most useful services to writing has been his interest in this problem of presenting decent European translations, and in publishing Seferis he adds to it. For those who only know Kavafis 'The Barbarians' (probably the pithiest thing written about the contemporary scene) the book should be a revelation of modern Greek poetry, and of its scope and seriousness.

Laurie Lee, whose work I have usually found eloquent but rather unorganized, has brought off a remarkable feat in his *Magellan*—it is both a poem of merit and a broadcastable play. Apart from Reed's adaptation of Moby Dick, we have had poetry for radio, conceived as a special medium, from MacNeice, who has conducted some worthwhile research in technique, from Edward Sackville-West ('The Rescue' was a remarkable experience at a hearing, though I do not know how it would read unsupported by production) Patric Dickinson's play, which I have not heard, and Treece's very recent piece about Caractacus, which failed, I felt, largely because the cast conceived it their duty to bawl—none of the poetic intention could

penetrate the din in the studio. Of all the work I have heard, Laurie Lee manages best to write verse which stands up, unsupported by anything but itself. I think this is essential, even in radio, because of the readiness with which even mediocre lines can be carried by competent acting. There is a valid poetic balance between the reality of *Magellan* and the fantastic effects of time on real experience—the sea and the new continents are as magical and ambiguous as they probably were to the discoverers, and as they still are to the landsman, and possibly even to the experienced sailor. Probably the ideal dramatic poem for broadcasting would be the 'Ancient Mariner', because of its directness and the fact that it sets its own scene. Lee has a strain of it, but not an imitative one. Another merit is that the imagery is taut enough to be unusual, but never contorted so that it misses fire at a single hearing.

> *And yet it seems we move not,*
> *only the land moves, and steals from us.*
> *Spain, you slide from me like a yellow fog,*
> *like a patch of bad weather going away on the breeze*
> *I do not grieve at your going. . . .*

For Lee, who writes very immediate, disorganized and, I would have said, primarily visual poetry, this type of writing is a considerable feat of self-discipline, and he quite obviously knows what he is about. I was most impressed with the whole piece, and I think that it has a far higher survival value than most *ad hoc* radio poetry.

ALEX COMFORT

LOUIS MACNEICE, *Holes in the Sky* (Faber, 7s. 6d.).

Mr. Macneice, as until recently Mr. Auden, has been always, in its best sense, an occasional poet. To say this implies a concern with contemporary life in its more immediate aspects, a bringing to the surface of the anonymous X qualities that lurk under the behaviourisms of a society and which in the end characterize it. In the 'thirties Mr. Macneice, after Mr. Auden, was perhaps the most skilled draughtsman of the emotional and social blueprint that we now accept as our mental image of the period. It was a mixture of gaiety and tenderness, of lyric acceptance and political concern, of dazzle in an existence that was already being underwritten. For Mr. Macneice, whose gifts are primarily lyrical, technical and casuist, it was the 'right' period, serious without being solemn and with nonchalant elegance still a virtue.

Since these days the manner of writing that characterized them has

disappeared, and the writers who used it so well have to all intents and purposes withdrawn. A different sort of poetry has emerged, and from the poets of the 'thirties there has been little remarkable except for Auden's 'The Sea and the Mirror', and a very few poems by Mr. Spender that retain their original quality. The one exception to this downslide has hitherto been Mr. Macneice. His last two books, *Plant and Phantom* and *Springboard*, were sustained performances of extraordinary accomplishment—elegant and aloof, one thought Mr. Macneice had been preserved from the infection of bad writing that had so struck his contemporaries. Now alas! with the publication of his new book one is not so sure.

Certainly, whatever view one may take of it, a great deal has been lost. Mr. Macneice has always in his choice of theme kept fairly close to what one might call 'journalistic topics', but once accepting that, his sleight-of-hand technical skill, his allusive polish, his elusive gay-seriousness, the intellectual attack of his imagery combined to make it a hallmark of its kind. Now it is apparent that work in a non-poetic medium has taken the edge off Mr. Macneice's feeling for words; what remained of his purity of language has been dulled into flat conventional jargon and the elaborate but skilled lyric conceit of his writing become obvious and overworked. Time and again Mr. Macneice repeats words in close conjunction to one another, for no apparent reason other than a sudden realization that their paradoxical use can get the line out of a 'longueur' ('Insisting on clinging to what he insists is gone.' 'To consider means is not mean.' 'That is the end of the news. The humanist thinks he has heard something new,' etc.), and which ultimately produce an effect of cheapness.

These are general criticisms, based on disappointment, that strike one about Mr. Macneice's new book. They are by no means all —technically, in their urgency, even in their moments of lyricism, these poems show a sad decline in poetic seriousness, in a care and concern for poetry, in a belief in its importance. The most sad thing in Mr. Macneice's re-creation of the common man ('Tom, Dick, and Harry,' 'Tom and Tessy'), is that his own poetry is becoming commonplace.

There would be no need to say much of this were Mr. Macneice not an important poet, immensely attractive, skilful and with a mind that rarely misses a target—were not in fact much of the responsibility for the good poetry of the 'forties on his shoulders. Mr. Cyril Connolly has lately lamented the lack of an *avant-garde* in contemporary letters, and Mr. Macneice will do less than justice to himself if he fails to provide it in his poetry.

When all this is said, and it is perhaps an over-colouring of one side of the picture (the side represented by the long poem 'The Stygian Banks' which is a great deal less successful than 'The Kingdom' in Mr. Macneice's last volume and far less adventurous), there remain a dozen poems of a quality and control that no one else in England could have written.

In a poem like 'Carrick Revisited':

Fog-horn, mill-horn, corncrake and church bell
Half heard through boarded time as a child in bed
Glimpses a brangle of talk from the floor below
But cannot catch the words. Our past we know
But not its meaning—whether it meant well.

and 'Woods':

And always we walk out again. The patch
Of sky at the end of the path grows and discloses
An ordered open air long ruled by dyke and fence,
With geese whose form and gait proclaim their consequence,
Pargetted outposts, windows bowed with thatch,
And cow pats—and inconsequent wild roses.

the brilliant 'Elegy for Minor Poets', or 'Autolycus':

O Master Pedlar with your confidence tricks,
Brooches, pomanders, broadsheets and what-have-you,
Who hawk such entertainment but rook your client
And leave him brooding, why should we forgive you
Did we not know that, though more self-reliant
Than we, you too were born and grew up in a fix?

Mr. Macneice preserves his original felicity, with an increased maturity and restraint that make one feel it is only a concern in himself that is lacking, and which prevents his whole book from being on the same level.

ALAN ROSS

LAURIE LEE, *The Bloom of Candles* (John Lehmann, 3s. 6d.); CONRAD AIKEN, *The Kid* (John Lehmann, 5s.); EDGELL RICKWORD, *Collected Poems* (The Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.).

Laurie Lee's slim, daffodil book contains twelve poems, 'verse from a poet's year'. A poet's year is in many ways the same as anyone else's, with wind and rain, sun and snow, season and festival; and readers will enjoy the seasonal landscapes as expert recollections of their own experience, like 'December Dawn':

The first light shakes on the frost-webbed window
Green as a laurel and thick as the sea.
My nostrils are stinging with blossoms of winter
My tongue holds a wafer of tasteless snow.

And 'Summer Rain':

Where in the valley the summer rain
Moves crazed and chill through the crooked trees
The briars bleed green, and the far fox-banks
Their sharp cries tangle in sobbing shades.

I hear the sad rinsing of reeded meadows
The small lakes rise in the wild white rose
The shudder of wings in the streaming cedars
And tears of lime running down from the hills.

All day in the tomb of my brain I hear
The cold wheat whisper, the veiled trees mourn,
And behold through windows of weighted ivy
The wet walls blossom with silver snails . . .

These things of the turning year are common experience, yet they are also the poet's own, and different from yours and mine. He, when they are gone, gives them a new and endless life. So that in 'Christmas Landscape', this poet, 'the blind walker about the desert year', sees, feels, and says in his own clear way:

Tonight the wind gnaws
with teeth of glass . . .

And the deeper meaning of the season is not lost, for:

. . . the mole sleeps, and the hedgehog
lies curled in a womb of leaves,
the bean and the wheat-seed
hug their germs in the earth
and the stream moves under the ice.

. . . In the blood of our grief
the cold earth is suckled,
in our agony the womb
convulses its seed,
in the cry of anguish
the child's first breath is born.

If Mr. Lee's poems at times give an impression of slightness, that is perhaps due to the rarefied quality of his vision. His words at first often seem strange, but soon they become part of a finely-wrought and very individual idiom: here is a poet who is physically alive, wonderfully sensuous and sensitive to the taste of a day. He can make your mouth feel bitter with the sadness of a dying season:

Slow moves the acid breath of noon
over the copper-coated hill . . .

and make warm and real the full ripeness of autumn:

Such a day it is when time
piles up the hills like pumpkins,
and the streams run golden.

When all men smell good,
and the cheeks of girls
are as baked bread to the mouth . . .

This acute awareness of the wonders of the physical world is well illustrated in the poem entitled 'Thistle', a true evocation of lost childhood: but the freshness and quick response of a child's eye have not been lost in these lines:

Thistle, blue bunch of daggers
rattling upon the wind,
saw-tooth that separates
the lips of grasses.

Your wound in childhood was
a savage shock of joy
that set the bees on fire
and the loud larks singing. . . .

In this collection of radiant and sombre notes for a poet's diary the 'Poem for Easter' stands out as a complete and memorable day.

Mr. Conrad Aiken's fine work is insufficiently known to most English readers, except perhaps for his poems in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*. The grandeur of 'Preludes for Memnon' seemed to indicate a poet capable of *une œuvre de longue haleine*, and here it is, though the grandeur is missing. *The Kid* is a long poem, an historical account of one William Blackstone, who might be called 'the first Bostonian', and whom Mr. Aiken regards as the 'true prototypical American', seventeenth-century ancestor of the early pioneers and

legendary heroes as well as of Thoreau, Melville, Henry Adams and Emily Dickinson. In the first section, the whole continent of America, in a grand ballad-rhythm reminiscent of negro spirituals and the vigorous folk-poetry of cowboy, sailor, tramp and navvy, salutes the advent of the Kid:

Who picked up the words from the prophet's mouth?
Grizzly up north, and longhorn south.
Who bore witness to that faring forth?
Buzzard down south, and eagle up north.
Prairie-dog cities swarming in the sun,
golden in the evening, and then not one.
Buffalo spine. A high grass growing.
Rattlesnake rattle and tumbleweed blowing.

Throughout the eight sections of this long hill-billy, this rollicking, breezy, open-air poem, Mr. Aiken has the luck to be able to use a lively, rich vocabulary of native words (glossary provided at the back), which gives great zest and a joyous tang to his lines. And one seems to hear the Andrews Sisters chanting in close harmony.

Mr. Rickword's love poems are musically and metaphysically sound, and his love for Donne has done much for many of his pieces: for example, 'Regret for the Depopulation of Rural Districts', in which the passing of a way of life is made also into an elegy for the death of human happiness and 'the Entire Scheme of Things'. He tries, not very successfully, an Eliot-like wit in 'Sir Orang Haut-ton at Vespers'. But in his own style of mordant and properly wicked humour, Mr. Rickword is excellent, as in 'Poet to Punk', 'The Handmaid of Religion', and the brilliant 'Hints for Making a Gentleman' with its Swiftian scorn and this conclusion, to be read in the tones of an enlightened Jack Warner:

So bravely watching death approach,
as free from fear as self-reproach,
he rightly trusts that he may save
his sense of values in the grave;
for as his body muckward sinks
he still lacks sense to tell he stinks.

This is a book to be read, not only as an accomplished entertainment in a special brand of light, but not too light, poetics, but also as a revealing and bitterly amusing commentary on a period of social and emotional barbarism.

JAMES KIRKUP

NORMAN NICHOLSON, *Rock Face* (Faber & Faber, 7s. 6d.); CHRISTOPHER LEE, *Under the Sun* (The Bodley Head, 6s.).

Only by affirming what is most real in regional, local and communal life will mankind be able to meet the challenge of the planetary, when every country will be within a few hours' reach of each other', wrote Mr. Philip Mairet; and no English writer is more aware of the validity of this statement than Mr. Norman Nicholson. Whether he writes a novel like *The Fire of the Lord*, a verse-drama like *The Old Man of the Mountains* or a volume of poems, the local atmosphere is there, giving a reality and a philosophy to everything he creates. That is not to suggest that *Rock Face*, his latest book of poems, is in any sense confined to the parochial—even some of the purely descriptive poems (for instance, 'The Land Under the Ice') possess an underlying significance which relates them to the world outside his native Cumberland. It is his regional outlook and feeling which make him so indubitably a poet of the universal.

For regionalism, if it is to perform its most vital function in poetry, can be neither retrogressive nor conducive to the artificial preservation of outdated language or manner of life. One might even assert that internationalism is a co-extension of the regional principle, depending, as it must do, upon the integration of a diversity of cultures. The regional attributes in poetry will, of course, vary with the special environment and experience of the poet concerned, and be informed by his own emotional impulsion. Perhaps the most striking feature of Mr. Nicholson's work is his preoccupation with the creative and cyclic processes of life, expressed mainly in terms of landscape and geology:

Memory is beautiful
As a stone, simple
As a sample of mountain,
A handful of hill.
Oh! cobble on the shore
Can you not remember
What you were before
The valleys were brought low?
Can you not forget
What it is never to know
Rock turning slowly
Back into rock
Long to-days ago?

It is this long-range vision of the continuity and purpose of life manifest in his approach to the simplest of themes (and at his simplest he is deceptive) which unifies much of his poetry and distinguishes it from that of his contemporaries. When this element is missing, his work falls to the topographical level, consisting of little more than a spontaneous, if sensitive, reaction to a particular scene. There are a few examples of this type, presumably written whilst Mr. Nicholson was collecting data for his book on Cumberland and Westmorland in the County Series. Nevertheless, he has a firm control over his material and his effective handling of image and metaphor usually prevent him from lapsing into occasional verse:

the water
Clinks its little teaspoons in the beck

and if the wind
Bend back the bracken, it is but as hands
Rub shadows into plush against the pile.

This is an age of ideologies and labels, and Mr. Nicholson has not escaped the modern tendency towards classification. Since the appearance of his first book it has been the practice of critics to include him, together with Kathleen Raine and Anne Ridler, in the 'Religious Poets' category, and not without adequate grounds. Displaying all the obvious characteristics of the Christian poet, he made such a classification an easy task. His early work was filled with specifically Christian images and terminology, and he frequently drew on Biblical history for his subject matter; though his approach was always highly original and his diction sufficiently novel to suspend the unbelief of critical readers (except when he overstepped the bounds of incongruity with such phrases as 'preserved in gelatine of Jesus' blood'). He was, one might say, a little premature in his eagerness to announce the re-emergence in literature of 'the classical and Christian conception of Man' (*Man and Literature*).

It is interesting, therefore, to observe that he is now giving far less attention to the superficial aspects and more to the intrinsic values of Christianity. What few Scriptural images he uses are strictly confined to appropriate phrases ('Chimneys are Lot's wives of salt') and poems ('Caedmon'), so that he no longer has to resort to surprise-tactics in order to achieve his objects. His material is better assimilated, too. As a result, his work not only shows a greater depth of thought and imaginative quality, but is more authentic in expressing the Christian interpretation of life through his own poetic experience. For this reason alone, *Rock Face* marks an important phase in his development.

In his later poems Mr. Nicholson seems to be aiming at a direct style, combining a colloquial language with an unusually individual presentation, best exemplified in 'Naaman':

I would have knelt
Hour after hour, my forehead spliced with prayer,
My hands holding my skull. Are not the lowland streams
Wider and purer and cleaner? Would not the tap
Give a better lather than this rocky gutter? I was a fool
To come—let me be fully a fool.
Let the old man have his way, and I'll return
With a bitter shell of scorn to guard my pain.
It's slippery here. The water's in my boots.
Damn boots and water. Come, boy, give me a towel.

In *Under the Sun* Mr. Christopher Lee has collected his work of the last five years, together with a number of poems from his three earlier volumes. The collection consists largely of simple descriptive and nature pieces, and although Mr. Lee has travelled further afield for his material than Mr. Nicholson—Anglesey, Cornwall, Essex and the Mediterranean Coast—his poems seldom have the vigour or immediacy of those in *Rock Face*. He is unduly burdened with the knowledge that 'time's weight strikes us all with the small, the "slight"—' and it is reflected in his writing. When he grows tired of watching the birds migrating he turns to watch the sheep jostling, the herons flying, the gorse and magnolias flowering, or even contemplates the effect of frost upon the mangolds. Yet within the limited province he has thus chosen he is a sound craftsman, and his keen eye for nature enables him to focus the intricate details (and particularly the colours) of his landscapes.

Under the Sun is divided into three sections: 'April and Anglesey', 'Winter and War' and 'Landscapes and Seasons'. It is the second section which shows his calibre as a poet of originality and creative talent.

Mr. Lee writes in a quiet and unassuming manner which calls for no effort on the part of the reader. One feels, at times, that he is too consistently quiet and that he exercises unnecessary restraint over his emotions. Certainly he possesses a delicate sensitivity and a feeling for words entirely adequate for what he has to say—it is unfortunate that he says so little.

HOWARD SERGEANT

AUDEN'S MODERN ECLOGUE

W. H. AUDEN, *The Age of Anxiety* (Random House, $2.50).

W. H. Auden has probably had more influence on the generation that grew up after Eliot and before Dylan Thomas than any other poet. His new book, *The Age of Anxiety*, is called a baroque eclogue because it adopts the pastoral convention in which a natural setting is contrasted with an artificial style of diction, the natural setting in this case being a bar on Third Avenue, later an apartment on the West side. The time is during the late war. It is probable that some of the most lasting poetry of this war will have been found to have been written by non-combatants, conscientious objectors and those who fled, like Auden, beyond the seas. Their work will remain, its value last. A piece of prose as bright and hard as a chromium towel rail introduces the actors in the poem who think and speak their pieces. There is Quant the clerk in a shipping office near the Battery, Malin the medical intelligence officer in the Canadian Air Force, Rosetta the buyer for the department store, and, lastly, Emble, the young man from the middle west who had enlisted in the Navy. The four characters begin by thinking heavenly in Audenesque verse that goes over the ground like a heavy cart over cobblestones. But one is brought up by the Anglo-Saxon note of the line that ends these rather confused soliliquies:

Many have perished; more will.

And such lines with a punch in them as:

Lies and lethargies police the world
In its periods of peace.

The appalling impersonal voice of the radio brings them all together and they join in conversation in the quieter intimacy of a booth. There is a lot of imitation of hot numbers from the radio such as Bugs in the Bed by Bog Myrtle and her Two-Timers, with the worst pangs of youth lightly brushed in:

To be young means
To be on edge, to be waiting in
A packed lounge for a Personal Call
From Long Distance, for the low voice that
Defines one's future.

But it all goes on much too long in spite of the Auglo-Saxon alliteration and lines like:

cupids on stilts,
Their beautiful bottoms breaking wind,
Hunted hares with hurricane lanterns
Through woods . . .

One becomes

Unattracted as tumbleweed. Time flies.

In spite of

William East is
Entering Olive as Alfred West
Is leaving Elaine; Lucky MacGuire
Joins in the joke.

There is even poetry such as:

And wild by the water, women stone
The broken torso but the bloody head
In the far distance floating away
Down the steady stream, still opening
Its charming mouth goes chanting on in
Fortissimo tones, a tenor lyre
Dimming the doom into a deaf Nature
Of her loose chaos.

But it is Quant, the civilian, rather old and something of a disappointed man, who contributes the most poetry. As the night wears on the words brighten and illuminate the more:

Ha-ha, ha-ha cried Hairy Mary
The lighthouse lady, little Miss Odds
And Will Walton the watercress man,
And pointed northward.

Then for a moment one almost feels that Auden has been reading Kenneth Patchen's *Albion Moonlight*. The words whirl round and we follow, hallucinated, to the end. Poets, however, live upon words, and so we nourish ourselves upon Auden, who has more verbal illumination to the square inch than all the climbing poetasters of two continents, ghosts of Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Rimbaud, and

all according to the part of the world they hail from. He has, in fact, in this book made words his deity:

unicorn herds
Galumphed through lilies; little mice played
With great cock-a-hoop cats; courteous griffins
Waltzed with wyverns.

It is impossible, however, to give any idea of the Lear-like Walpurgis night by quotation. It must be read in toto, preferably to the accompaniment of old port or brandy. I feel that it should occur to poets that if they can put the whole of their mental life into their poems as Auden does the result should be a cocktail from which claustrophobia would fade into the Stygian distance, Acheron worth crossing, life worth pushing back beyond the arrival of the atom bomb, or any other passing disturbance of homo non-sapiens.

But there is a diffuseness probably due to Quant's going back too many times to the bar to fetch more drinks. One feels that when poets become dramatic in verse we are entitled to more poetry from their automata than is usually found in the Rosettas and Embles of this world. By about the middle of the book the characters are raised to the divine state of semi-intoxication when the shy talk easily and brilliantly to total strangers, the stammerers get through complicated sentences without a hitch, and all enter into a condition where they establish a rapport in which they can communicate thoughts and feelings so accurate and instantaneous that they appear as a single organism, and return happily to a state of prehistoric happiness in which the poetry went on. In Part Three the backcloth of the bar dissolves into verse on a higher level, like a stage trick in the production of a modern play. Each of the characters is responsible for a short lyric rather reminiscent in content to Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi'. Then they all fall asleep and dream of excursions on bicycles, by boat, on foot, talking like somnambulists of the thing remembered by the surface of the mind. At last they all wake up in darkness. The barman has turned out the light. There is nothing left for them to do but return to Rosetta's apartment. Driving through the half-lit empty streets they lament in some of the best poetry in the book Man's torpor of spirit, the indigent dryness of his soul, his bottomless credulity, his perverse preference for the meretricious and the insipid. But on reaching Rosetta's apartment or, as we say, flat, they try to banish their gloom and put on the party spirit. They turn on the midnight dance band and sing verses like this from an old prospector's ballad:

When Laura lay on her ledger side
And nicely threw her north cheek up,
How pleasing the plight of her promising grove
And how rich the random I reached with a rise.

Rosetta and Emble soon become maudlingly attached to each other in the manner of war-time parties, and swear eternal affection touchingly. In their drunken state they feel that the description of the world in the right terms will be quite enough to cause absolute pleasure to descend on the astonished armies and abolish for ever all hate and suffering. Then Malin catches Quant's eye and they leave Rosetta and Emble to the final apotheosis, but when Rosetta comes back from seeing them off she finds that he has passed out, which makes the situation easier and allows her a hundred and twenty-eight lines to express her feelings. The book ends with the soliliquies of Malin and Quant as they go home in the early morning, to a bright clear day for work and war.

It is a strange modern eclogue with as much meat in the verse as there are steaks in New York. But the reader tires often of the continual brightness of the language and thirsts for more lines containing nothing but what goes straight to the heart as well as the mind. The Rosetta stone made it possible for modern scholars to translate Egyptian hieroglyphics. Auden has a large public measured in terms of poetry readers to-day, but it will not become larger, for he still loves the play of strange words rather than the clear meaning. The script remains hieratic.

WREY GARDINER

GARLAND FOR DE LA MARE

Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday (Faber & Faber, 15s.).

As one looks over the field of English letters in the last half-century it is difficult to light upon any other figure to whom a book of just this kind might have been presented on his seventy-fifth birthday—unless indeed it had been Yeats, who died just a year too soon to have been eligible for it. For this book is not merely a series of tributes from well-known personalities; it would not ever be difficult to find some forty such names ready to offer their modicum of praise to a major literary contemporary. But it is the nature of these offerings, their range and diversity, which are their distinguishing features.

For these tributes have not been elicited merely, or even chiefly,

from those whom one might expect to find here: contemporaries from the early volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, or poets in that tradition. They are here, of course—and one laments the absence, by a few short years, of Lascelles Abercrombie and W. H. Davies: there is Gordon Bottomley with a brief lyric; Wilfrid Gibson with eight poems celebrating the various places where he had met his old friend, and rejoicing that

The child within your heart had never died;

Ralph Hodgson with a delamarish little poem, 'Tobit'; Masefield and Gerald Bullett with poems that both hail their subject as 'The Traveller'; and Dunsany's verses evoking 'The Magician'. These names, and some others here, we expected. But the appeal of de la Mare's work transcends the boundaries of contemporaneity, whether measured in years or idiom; and we find poets as different in tradition and technique as T. S. Eliot and Cecil Day Lewis joining the Georgian galaxy of praise in verse. Day Lewis sees de la Mare as one of those

who bring us news we had almost forgot we needed

—the answer to our hearts' hunger; and Eliot's delicate *terza rima* honours his

conscious art practised with natural ease,

and his mastery of

The inexplicable mystery of sound.

It seemed fitting first to consider the verse contributions, for it is his stature as a poet that this book really serves to honour; when de la Mare writes in Dryden's 'other harmony' it is still from the marginal lands of poetry that the winds of his imagination and his music flow. Yet the actual verses here cover no more than twenty-eight pages out of a hundred and ninety-five. For the rest, the first hundred pages consist of tributes, general or specific, to his art; the last sixty, of original contributions in his honour: essays or studies of which he is the inspiration, and of which the subject would often specially interest him, but which are, ostensibly, unrelated to him or his work. Pictorially, Barnett Freedman contributes a coloured lithograph of a very youthful cherub bringing the bays; 'Max,' a delightful caricature. There are two photographs, one by Colin de la Mare taken last year, and an excellent (but undated) drawing by William Rothenstein. A page of facsimile MS. from *Miss Duveen* completes the illustrations.

Sir Edward Marsh modestly prefaces the collection with a letter to the poet, and J. B. Priestley with some memories and appreciations of his stories and his anthologies. 'There is', he reminds us, ' a de la Mare world, unlike anybody else's. It exists chiefly in the twilit region between the conscious mind of our time and the great deep of the collective unconscious . . . we are perpetually on the edge of things, moving warily in the borderland.'

The contributions in this first half of the book are widely varied. Vita Sackville-West has 'A Note on *The Traveller*', and it was gratifying to the present writer to find her noting, as he did when reviewing the book, the influence of Coleridge; an influence of which the poet confessed himself quite unaware when composing it! But, incidentally, the line she cites as a blemish,

So, though he too was now but vaguely aware,

is surely only an iambic pentameter, with a strong accent on 'So' and a use of the Coleridgean syllabic equivalence in 'though he too'. The other writers here include F. S. Boas, Thomas Moult, Sir Stephen Tallent with a delicious description of the poet's work on sugar rationing in the Food Controller's office in 1917-18 (!), and Professor Dover Wilson with a tribute to de la Mare as being the first to dare avow in print that, in the *Dream* Shakespeare but worked over an older play. But the three that linger longest in my mind are Middleton Murry's 'Over the Bridge and Far Away', Lord David Cecil on the longer tales and Graham Greene on the short stories.

It is to de la Mare's poetry before 1914 that Mr. Murry finds himself returning—especially to *The Listener's* volume: 'the last modern poetry that I could entirely and unfeignedly enjoy' because it belonged to the 'old and precious emotional pattern' of our world before the hell of modern warfare invaded it. Mr. Murry sees Man, constantly threatened by mass obliteration, as likely to be unable to organize his experience poetically. He hints at the fragmentation already present in *The Waste Land* type of poetry:

> ' "London Bridge has fallen down." Perhaps de la Mare was the last man to get safely across. . . . Perhaps the time is at hand when only the birds will sing. De la Mare will then be counted one of the last humans who did.'

A compelling, if somewhat chilly, speculation.

For Graham Greene, as one would expect, it is the questioning of ultimate things, and the obsession with death in de la Mare's work

that interests him. ' "MORS. And what does MORS mean? . . . It means—well, sleep", I said, "Or nightmare, or dawn, or nothing, or —it might mean everything" ', he quotes from *Ding Dong Bell*, adding, 'One thing it will be noticed in these stories, MORS does not mean—it does not mean Hell—or Heaven.' In de la Mare's world there are no easy answers; he hopes but he does not know; and Mr. Greene quotes his 'Mr. Kempe' in illustration:

> 'There's Free Will, for example; there's Moral Responsibility; and such little riddles as where we all come from and where we are going to—why, we don't even know what we are—in ourselves, I mean. And how many of us have tried to find out?'

On a recent Mass-Observation test in this country only about 37 per cent. had even vaguely asked themselves the question! It is this sudden hint of the terror of the unknown that seems to Mr. Greene the secret of de la Mare's power and his hold on his readers:

> 'We are wooed and lulled sometimes to the verge of sleep by the beauty of the prose, until suddenly without warning a sentence breaks in mid-breath and we look up and see the terrified eyes of our fellow-passenger, appealing, hungry, scared as he watches what we cannot see—"the sediment of an unspeakable obsession", and a certain glibness would seem to surround our easy conscious Christian answers to all that wild speculation, if we could ever trust ourselves to urge that cold comfort upon this stranger travelling "our way".'

This is as the poet would have it: a childlike trust—yes; a supernatural Christian faith, if it be granted—yes; but a glib intellectualized certainty—never.

Both Graham Greene and Lord David Cecil recall his 'derivation' from Emily Brontë. But there is kinship also with another woman writer, a late contemporary upon whom 'the burden of the mystery' lay heavily. When Mr. Greene quotes from *Ding Dong Bell:*

> ' "Yes, yes!" we all seemed to be whispering—from the Cedar of Labanon to the little hyssop in the wall—"here we all are; and still, thank heaven, safe. *Safe*" ',

it is of Virginia Woolf we think, and of the opening pages of *A Haunted House*.

Lord David Cecil, whose sensitive, balanced appraisal of 'The Prose Tales' is one of the most satisfying things in the book, opens with the same thought as E. V. Knox. Mr. Knox begins: 'I may be doing him a terrible injustice, but I cannot believe that Walter de

la Mare was ever greatly interested in elephants'; and Lord Cecil similarly conceives of the de la Mare world as

> 'elfin, haunted gossamer; and with a curious bias towards the miniature. . . . When Mr. de la Mare wishes to praise God for the beauty of His creation, he chooses microscopic examples: a seed of grass, a speck of stone.'

For him, de la Mare is the symbolist concerned in his images with ultimate human experience, certain of only one thing, that

> 'Man should realize the spiritual nature of the universe, he must never forget that the material world is not the only world; or he will lay his soul open to the attack of the forces of destruction who are always lying in wait for him.'

For de la Mare 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on', and some of the dreams he makes on us will last as long as anything in contemporary literature; especially the dreams he builds on children, whose characters, as Lord Cecil says, are

> 'drawn with a wonderful intimate insight, made warm by countless strokes of tender and humorous observation'.

I have dealt fully with the first half of this book because to do so seemed one of the best ways to glance at facets of de la Mare's genius. The contents of the third part offer little such opportunity. They reveal, as all 'original' writing should, the personality of the writers rather than that of the recipient of their offerings: Blunden browsing over an eighteenth-century undergraduate anthology; David Garnett pleasantly reminiscing over the 'dear, dead days' of his childhood in Kent half a century ago; Robert Lynd writing on 'Animals in Childhood', and Henry Williamson on his farm pets—chiefly his multiplicity of cats; or L. A. G. Strong retailing his amusing little story of the 'Ducks from Durragh'. And the writers at the end join hands with those at the beginning to complete the garland with a two-page 'Salute to Modesty' from Gilbert Frankau, and a greeting from the U.S.A. from Christopher Morley. Praising the poet's 'demon magic' he confesses:

> 'I have never been quite the same—not quite so cumbered with mere soil—since first reading *Peacock Pie;* more than a generation ago.'

'Who ever grew older so gracefully?', asks Mr. Morley. Older—not old. For at seventy-five Walter de la Mare is not old. To say that is not to see him as a facile escapist; one who has slipped away from the realities of contemporary life into the imaginative world of

childhood and the fantasia of dreams. Those who think of him only in those terms know indeed one important side of his work, but they do not understand the whole man; and, lacking that, they lack an adequate understanding of even the side they do know. Those worlds of childhood and dream are not escapes from this one, but means of interpreting and apprehending it. There is repeated stress among these tributes on the persistence of 'The Traveller' and 'The Listener' images in his work, and it is an important clue.

For de la Mare the surface appearance of daily living in the contemporary world has something of a nightmare quality—and this comes out in his prose tales and in poems in all his volumes from *Motley* to *The Burning-Glass*. But that is not the reality of existence. News of that reality comes to us only in gusts and whispers —and comes only when our minds are unfettered and when we raise no barriers of intellectualization or busy-ness to keep them out. Hence, as with Traherne, Wordsworth, or Vaughan, he finds those apprehensions to be most persistent in the child; and, like Emily Brontë, in the world of dream and vision. Man is a Traveller on a pilgrimage—whither? De la Mare never commits himself definitely beyond saying, 'To Death'. But Death is to him certainly not annihilation; it is only the step into the unknown. And Man is also a Listener, harkening to the 'unheard melodies' that 'pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone'—bringing their hints and guesses about that unknown, which is inapprehensible to the world-muddied mind of conscious man. And—again as for Wordsworth—de la Mare feels we catch those fleeting messages, that 'News from a foreign country', best when

We are laid asleep in body
And become a living soul.

His externalization of such apprehensions in his poems of childhood and dream are very important aspects of them. And de la Mare has consciously sought to see the world with the eyes of a child's daily renewed wonder over even the commonest things:

The lovely in life is the familiar,
And only the lovelier for continuing strange.

Among the tributes to his many books and to the varied aspects of his genius, it was a disappointment to find no more than incidental references to what is to me one of the most enduring of all his productions—the 1945 poems in *The Burning-Glass:* a volume showing a growing consciousness of the presence of Death brooding in the wings. He treats It gravely, but as a now familiar spirit; yet one

who will keep Its secrets to the end. But this leaves nothing fevered or frustrated in the poet's work; maturely young and innocently wise he waits, if not in certitude—too many nightmares have troubled the dreams for that—at least in quiet hope; and yet clinging to a world whose beauties and exquisite joys, despite its evils, its pains, and its torments, he cannot bear to leave:

One yet how often the prey of doubt and fear,
Of bleak despondence, stark anxiety;
Ardent for what is neither now nor here,
An Orpheus fainting for Eurydice;

Not yet inert, but with a tortured breast
At hint of that bleak gulf—his last farewell;
Pining for peace, assurance, pause and rest,
Yet slave to what he loves past words to tell;

A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
Who still at western windows stays to win
A transient respite from the latening sky,
And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in.

That is the portrait he leaves to us in that volume.

May the 'transient respite' of the gods be indefinitely extended that he may long wear with honour this garland with which his friends have so graciously crowned him.

HERMANN PESCHMANN

A PACKET FROM FRANCE

PAUL CLAUDEL, *Poèmes et Paroles durant la guerre de trente ans* (Gallimard).

If there is no final distinction between the realm of being and that of existence, the distinction is at least provisionally useful. Whatever the philosophical implications, the poet who searches to make his work the allegory or articulation of an inner life must constantly find himself in transit from one realm to the other, or at a standstill on the frontiers of both. Only a rare gift of insight for which few poets have had the inclination—Dante in the *Vita Nuova*, Yeats in *A Vision*, Bréton in *L'Amour Fou*—will reveal in detail the relative power of the rival claims of these two realms. It is the business of the philosopher and the psychological critic to pursue the analysis. Such analysis must always appear to the genuine poet as superfluous, a kind of æsthetic dilettantism of metaphysical

jugglery, which in creative pride he no doubt believes he could improve upon or even dispense with altogether. It is when poetry becomes integrated within the ethos of a dominant ideology as that of Church, State or a political minority, that questions only incidentally relevant to its life assume a special importance. As Yeats wrote:

To-day
We are but critics half-create,

and the same poet rails, not without reason, as Paul Valéry for finding contentment in the fact that human life must pass. It is difficult enough to justify existence once the germ of disillusion attacks the sensibility and the moral temptation of the poet becomes that of yielding either to the claims of pure being or mere existence. In the first instance, he risks the sacrifice of his creative gift through religious abnegation; in the second, he becomes too identified with the historic process to achieve the perspective which is essential for the supremacy of the imagination. These respective attitudes however may be reduced to a single one.

For the fundamental problem is that of belief. Existence, by itself, for anyone who has higher pretensions in living than that of a trifler, time-server or hedonist, implies the urgency of the world of phenomena; being involves, sooner or later, the question of immortality, with its greater emphasis on the sacredness of the human personality. It is, in fact, the rival claims of these two attitudes, which constitute the basis of the special problem of this century. Not that it is at all a new problem. It is a problem which each age, according to its individual circumstances, is obliged to define its own attitude. Were it capable of a final solution, Time would become merged into Eternity, and the Millenium imminent.

No doubt it was the excitement of the idea of evolution, and the modern speeding-up of communications which diverted the attention of thinkers from the more permanent features of life, and whilst investing nature with a new anthropomorphic importance, threatened to weaken the elementary instinctive reactions of joy and wonder, which in more energetic times, were the source of poetic vitality. Hence the indispensable value for our age of Blake and Lawrence, poets, whose voice is the living voice of the human heart and soul, and whose work is more than the mere culmination of an epoch (as might, on the contrary, be said of Joyce, Proust, Eliot). As Middleton Murry has pointed out, the crown of Keats' achievement was his final reconciliation of the two realms through the medium of poetry, as of Dostoievsky in that of prose fiction.

Enough has, however, been written by contemporary critics, such as Herbert Read, Edwin Muir and Wallace Fowlie, to delineate the territories of mystic and poet, whilst a writer like Roland de Ronneville in *L'Experience Poetique*, by attributing the poetic activity exclusively to the supernatural, auctions the loaf without the crust. The avowed mystagogue might do worse than study Dean Inge, and take it to heart that 'pure spirit is pure fiction', a salutary admission from a disciple of Plotinus. All criticism, in effect, which aspires to a conception of poetry beyond that of a mere jig-saw puzzle must sooner or later take into account this wider sphere, apart from which poetry could neither live, nor move, nor have its being.

I am venturing these observations here, because Catholic critics possess an indubitable advantage in having at their service a definite philosophy of being, an equipment which not only provokes frequent envy among non-Catholics, but is, if often indirectly, a forcible means of propaganda. The advantages of such a philosophy are not only that it provides the assenting artist with a safety-valve against insidious heresies and a host of misconceptions which are liable to confuse the issue for the uninstructed, but that it uncompromisingly defines the sphere of art and of the artist's work as an intermediary between the two realms of existence. Equally there are disadvantages, to which the loyal Catholic must be blind, since dogma, as both Nietzsche and Jung affirm, whilst securing the believer against dissolution, necessarily imposes the most rigid limits upon his experience. For this very reason I am personally obliged to attribute a more intense value to Blake and Lawrence, and I might add to Rilke and Yeats because I am able to detect in them the operation of an emancipated energy of greater weight and variety than I find in those poets who, in whatever degree, conform to dogmatic standards. In the criticism of Maritain and Wallace Fowlie, the outstanding rebels, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and their satellites are treated as a result with a kind of casuistic justification which baulks the whole issue.

I know that here I am skating on very thin ice, and lay myself open to any number of charges of secularism, heresy, or Protestant bias. But France is pre-eminently a country of allegiances where these counters play a very decisive rôle, more so than ever at the moment. Not that this is by any means a happy sign. For the effort is one on the part of each *petite chapelle* to gain ascendancy by the improvisation of an abstract autonomy, a state of affairs, which threatens to subject all experience and imagination to the mind,

and the thing (as Sterne so wisely remarked of the French) to the word. Hence, too, all the brouhaha of Existentialism which is simply a serving-up of the left-overs of philosophic controversies in an unappetizing hors d'œuvre. One begins to doubt whether in such conditions poetry can really flourish at all, whether the verse that is written had any more value than that of footnotes to some system of ideas, whether indeed all that poetry is doing here is to make a noble effort to survive.

'There is a Catholic art,' wrote de Gourmont, 'there is no Christian art'. And Leon Bloy seems to agree: there may be exceptionally unhappy souls to be encountered who are at once artists and Christians, but there cannot possibly be a Christian art. In the heyday of Western Christendom, the Middle Ages, the literary first fruits of an integrated civilization, the songs of the Troubadours, are not immediately inspired by religious devotion, that is to say, they are not poetry subordinated to the demands of Catholic orthodoxy. Indeed, the later theological affinities of these poets were heretical, and it was the condemnation of the Albigenses which led to their decline and ultimate extinction. Evidently the Catholic soul must wrestle within himself to find the legitimate proportion between his individual belief and the overwhelming claim of nature and organized society.

Out of such a conflict Paul Claudel, now on the verge of eighty, emerged. A son and lover of the soil, he found himself as a young poet on the steps of the Quay d'Orsay, exposed to the rampant scepticism of Darwin and Spencer. In the course of a highly-coloured career as French Resident in Paraguay and Guatemala, the greatest happiness of the future Ambassador was to dedicate himself, in the sphere of poetry, to the supreme mission of an ambassador of God. It is difficult perhaps at first to see in the devotional colloquies which form the substance of *Poèmes et Paroles*, a self-confessed disciple of Mallarmé, until the moment comes when we recognize that Claudel's achievement has been to give a special direction to that poet's legacy in the attempt to fuse the mystic and æsthetic aspirations of Symbolism according to a formula of his own. As Max Jacob insists, Mallarmé just escaped being a classic, by reason of his unnaturalness and obscurity. In other words, he was faced with the doubtful and treacherous necessity of creating a form of transcendence for himself. The disciple, as Catholic, at once has the advantage of his master. Both in drama and verse he is exalted and overpowered by the sense of the Omnipotence of God, the impermanence of the earthly struggle and the vanity of mere intel-

lectualism. In his message, the clarion of the triumphant crusader, there can be nothing esoteric to the Catholic; the unbeliever may read with real envy these eloquent lines, where on a pattern which follows the impulse of faith alone, the world and the spirit are admirably reconciled. Here for once is a poet who finds nothing tragic in the prospect of a final dissolution of the created world nor astonishing in the desolate corruption of a civilization on the road to hell only because it refuses the sovereignty of God. Not that there is any implicit contempt for the human. The heart of man and the fruits of the earth are dear because they are God's, and their glory is their share in the universal offering.

It is poetry which one listens to rather than reads, as one does in the case of Apollinaire, but here the personal voice is entirely suppressed; there is no song in this plea of a surrendered soul; it is the whole voice of Catholic France which speaks. In *Personalité de la France* he interprets his country's mission:

Ton affaire, c'est le vin!
Donne le vin au monde horrible!
Et lève vers le Divin
Une coupe intelligible!

The note of a sincerity which is above question and of an exaltation borne on the pinions of faith taken alone demonstrate an enthusiasm which differs only in degree from that of the Welsh Revivalist or the Salvation Army lass. Apart from an inevitable monotony of these devotional verses and the suspicion they arouse of rising from emergency conditions, it is impossible to read Claudel continuously without an effort to resist his indefatigable rhetoric. If this is how the Catholic patriot interprets our catastrophic age, *Poèmes et Paroles* is a noble and well-intentioned, not so say high-spirited, testament. For the non-Catholic, albeit a Christian, the texture is a little too thick, the tension too strained, the pace too accelerated, to compel assent. True there is a vehement beauty and pathos, but even these lack focus and from time to time suggest Victor Hugo in the rôle of Catholic apologist. 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us,' Keats avers, and whoever shares this hatred will easily recognize that such poetry is apt to trespass from the territory of art into that of magic, and even if not through deliberate contrivance, to induce spurious emotions of a specific kind which dissolve upon conscious reflection. This incidentally is one of the major objections, not to Surrealism, but to its programmatic activities. The 'Surreal' may be acknowledged, and even

preferred to the romantic or naturalist *impasses*, but the idea of verse or painting, prefabricated and clinically sealed with the sole aim of impelling the reader or spectator to attain a particular mental condition is merely a form of necromancy. It is just here that Claudel goes astray. One sighs for more of the unessential elements of existence or even for the alloy of doubt, for cool and shade in case the light is so strong as to blind or the heat to scorch.

The most crucial aspect of the poetic problem in this century, as in the later renaissance, remains that of attaining the happy mean between *sciento* (intellect) and *ingegno* (wit or genius). Always ahead in technical experiment and theory, France, prolific as ever at the moment, is more impoverished than England through lack of real inventiveness. Poetry has descended from Olympus and is concerned only to take its modest queue from piety, philosophy and even journalism. Most poets appear to have reached the margin of the abyss where real creation begins but none has the heart or guts to bridge it. Raising its revolutionary voice with the Cubists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, it indulged too long in an orgy of destruction, to recoil exhausted from the sterner and more joyous task of re-creation. The real enemy of the healthy inventiveness of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, is the unconscious puritanism which withdraws from the object in iconoclastic indignation towards a metaphysics of despair or the banal repetition of personal reactions. Finally this impoverishment yields Existentialism, the last word in the human desiccation of spiritual orphans weaned too ruthlessly from the breasts of faith.

And truly in comparison with such art as has been informed by faith, even if the faith were predominantly a poetic one, as in Blake or Keats, the existential road is a thoroughfare of darkness relieved only by the inconstant flicker of that feeble light which is all that is left to the man with none but his own resources. Through the gathering darkness which he assumes is final, he travels on, an existence in search of essence, a denuded ego in a cosmos indifferent alike to his aspirations and his anxieties. Broadly speaking, we are in the presence here of a disguised puritanism, another Protestant heresy which, abjuring the way of faith, arrives by the circuitous path of experience at those merely negative truths, which isolated from their orthodox context mark but a further stage in the regression to futile denial. The net result in poetry seems to be the formation of a new sensibility without precise direction. Enclosed within the bounds of circumstance, it is the complement of all that is rich and positive in Claudel.

THE EAGLE, THE LION, AND THE FLEUR-DE-LYS

JOHN CROWE RANSOME, *Selected Poems* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 9s.); ALLEN TATE, *Poems* 1920–1945 (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 10s. 6d.), *Poems* 1937–1942 (PL Editions); SIDNEY KEYES, *Minos of Crete* (Routledge, 10s. 6d.); ROLAND GANT, *Listen, Confides the Wind* (Fortune Press, 7s.); *A Mirror of French Poetry* 1840–1940, selected and edited by CECILY MACKWORTH (Routledge, 10s. 6d.); *Apollinaire to Aragon*, translated with an Introductory Essay by W. J. STRACHAN (Methuen, 7s. 6d.); *Poesie* '39–45, edited with an Introduction by PIERRE SEGHERS (Editions Poetry London, 15s.); PATRICE DE LA TOUR DU PIN, *The Dedicated Life in Poetry* (The Harvill Press, 7s. 6d.).

To begin this review with a generalization, we can say that while modern European verse (despite all apparent contradictions) is rooted in the unconscious memory of great word-patterns of the past, the finest contemporary American poetry (the finest, that is, formally speaking) derives in a more conscious fashion from the memory of this inheritance.

Accepting the statement as it stands, we may more readily comprehend the merits and limits of two American poets whose work, in book form, is being published for the first time in this country.

Now the verse of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransome is undoubtedly among the very best work being written today in the English-speaking world; and amongst the poetry being composed by figures of the same generation as these poets, it possesses a position second only perhaps to that occupied by the verse of Eliot. Why it should take a second place here is well explained by an observation of Allen Tate in 1932. 'The prior conditions for great poetry, given a great talent,' he wrote, 'are two: the thoroughness of the poet's discipline in a great objective system of "truths", and his lack of consciousness of such a discipline.' This lack of consciousness, this rich unawareness, is something that neither of these poets possess. Like Eliot, they have both had to acquire, by a partly academic concentration, that heritage of comely dynamic speech which should be the birthright of every poet. Unlike Eliot, however, whose acceptance of the Anglican way of life may be considered as a late baptism into a traditional time-honoured ethos, they have remained in a milieu even more barbarous, crude and apathetic (in terms, that is, of the values of culture) than that in which we English poets write. A paradoxical result of this is that they have been forced to accentuate these newly acquired traditional devices, so that by contrast the

latter appear, not as venerable modes of speech, but as idiosyncrasies. The traditionalist to-day seems a revolutionary being.

Of the two, John Crowe Ransome is the more accessible poet. He mouths his meaning with a fine sonority; and F. B. Millett, in his work on *Contemporary American Authors*, has noticed the blending in his verse 'of the acrid and the glamorous, the intellectual and the brutal, the macabre and the elegant'. In these poems, which owe so much to Donne, the mock-heroic is constantly approaching and coinciding with the heroic. From this emotional parallelism a sort of tragic irony is born; a kind of salted astringent pathos; an expression of but not a surrender to feeling. Consider, for example, 'Parting, without a Sequel', 'Dead Boy', 'Necrological', or 'Here lies a Lady', whose final stanza I give below:

> *Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and toughly, I hope*
> *ye may thole,*
> *But was she not lucky? In flowers and lace and mourning,*
> *In love and great honour we bade God rest her soul*
> *After six little spaces of chill, and six of burning.*

The poetry of Allen Tate, while owing much as Ransome's does to the verse of the seventeenth century, is an even more indirect and involuted art—a poetry of gloom and sudden passion, of dark hints, of spasms of anger and pride; a poetry haunted by the ghost of Swift; an art more than somewhat suggestive of the death-mask: at the same time, secretive, personal, and formal. In his own words, Allen Tate has described his technique as 'gradually circling round the subject, threatening it and filling it with suspense, and finally accomplishing its demise without ever quite using the ultimate violence upon it':

> *The secret ones around a stone*
> *Their lips withdrawn in meet surprise*
> *Lie still, being naught but bone*
> *With naught but space within their eyes.*

David Gascoyne, whose volume of *Poems* 1937–1942 has now reached its third impression, presents to us a consciousness profoundly troubled by the spectre of the meaningless. As mortality and the transience of life are the themes that most absorb Allen Tate, so the lack of purpose, the aimlessness of existence are the themes which have most obsessed David Gascoyne. 'They take one,' writes Cyril Connolly of these poems, 'as near the edge of the precipice as a human being is able to go and still turn back.' In other words, the poet has had a vision of the void, but has still preserved his sense of

verbal balance; which many modern poets powerfully affected by the awfulness of things have often failed to do. There is nothing here of those detonated word-scapes which the verse of a poet such as Patchen displays. However severe the spiritual crisis which Gascoyne personally may have endured, verbally speaking he has kept his morale. In terms of speech, he has mastered his fate. Whether or not the poet's conversion to Christianity should prove a soporific as far as the production of verse is concerned, *Poems* 1937–1942 will undoubtedly be remembered as a signal collection.

Minos of Crete is a three-act play written by Sidney Keyes in his last year at Tonbridge at just over eighteen years of age. Its aim, wrote Keyes, was 'really twofold: firstly as a frame for several ideas, particularly that of a particular conception of destiny; and secondly, as a psychological study of perversion and obsession'. This 'particular conception' the play exhibits as one where destiny is envisaged both as the discharge or fulfilment of necessity and as the achievement of self-revelation; and is one which is deeply interesting to compare with the ideas of fate which Keyes embodied in his two long poems, 'The Foreign Gate' and 'The Wilderness'.

Minos of Crete is not written in verse, but in a kind of sybilline aphoristic prose (especially the speeches of Phædra). The appeal of the play, however, does not rest upon any exceptional verbal beauty, but rather upon the situation and the sure resolution of the problem posited. For a young poetic dramatist this is most unusual; and one must regret with bitterness or grief that we cannot also write, most promising.

This volume, edited by Michael Meyer, contains in addition five stories and an essay, together with selections from his Notebook and Letters and four unpublished early poems. Unlike many poets, the mind of Keyes combined reflection and inspiration in an almost equal degree, perhaps; and nothing that he wrote is quite without its individual signature of underlying meaning. To those who would better understand this young Hamlet-in-khaki, the present volume is indispensable.

To the readers of POETRY QUARTERLY the name of Roland Gant will be quite familiar; and here we have a volume of poems and prose fantasies written between and 1938 and 1945.

Roughly speaking, I recognize three types and phases of poems in this work: the first being that in which the influence of nature and nature poetry is most strongly perceived; the second being that in which enthusiasm for the political cause of the Left and the *Pylon* poets predominates; and the third, that in which a deeper and more

personal experience is communicated in an individual manner. Of these three groups the last, by far, makes for the most compelling reading. Written in the autumn of 1944 in a German prison camp, they grimly record an integrity retained in disillusionment. Sparse in words, controlled in feeling, and often staccato in their movement, these poems, in their ungarnished manner, at their best, strike home with the force of bare facts.

'Translation from poetry', writes Cecily Mackworth in the preface to her anthology, 'can only be made by poets, that is, by people who have retained . . . that primitive fear and respect for the Word'; and in a poetry not of ideas but of impressions, which French verse from Baudelaire till today presents, the suggestion and radiation of a phrase can only be rendered by translators receptive to the wave-length of the poet's own mind. Occasions, I should say, when this contact occurs—this poetic pollination of sound and sense—are found in Vernon Watkin's version of Paul Fort's 'Harmonious Vision of the Earth', in Norman Cameron's rendering of Rimbaud's bitter horse-play 'The Stolen Heart', in Arthur Symons' re-creation of Verlaine's lunar elegance and sorrow, in Gascoyne's echo of Pierre-Jean Jouve, in Kirkup's whispered interpretation of Pierre Reverdy's haunted night-scene, in Alma Strettell's re-intonation of Emile Verhaeren's repetitive chant, and in A. L. Lloyd's translation of that baiter of the bourgeois, Charles Cros' 'Smoked Herring'.

W. J. Strachan, the translator and editor of the second French collection, is also a poet.

Including the work of such different writers as Carco, Supervielle, Cocteau, Tzara, Tour du Pin, Eluard, Aragon, and Jouve, this anthology, its editor maintains, is possessed none the less of a certain unity, a certain common accent given to this writing by reason of its shared 'modernity'; that quality which T. S. Eliot observes 'can be perceived by sensibility, but not defined in words'.

This reflex-action of the poet to his times, I find most intensely, intriguingly present in the rendering of Francis Carco's poem, 'The Shadow' (a kind of small-hours elegy which most strikingly recalls David Gascoyne's 'Noctambules'). Other evident successes spring from Mr. Strachan's endeavour to convey the gusto of Apollinaire, his Whitman-esque range of appetite and his sense of metropolitan fantasy; from his preservation of disturbing music in that poet of secular vespers, Leon-Paul Fargue; and from his recreated appeal of Aragon's lovely laments for France.

Compared with the last two, M. Segher's collection wears an exotic and heterogeneous air. Its contents, to begin with, are not

limited to verse; and the moral meditations of Vercors on the war rub friendly printed shoulders with Paulhan's thoughts on Braque, with Elsa Triolet's short story, with Quenau's ironic allegory, with Gide's definition of poetry, and Noel Devaulx's phantasmagoria. This is not to suggest, however, that the editor of *Poésie* found no room in his pages for verse, and poems by Eluard, Emmanuel, and Frénaud, Aragon, Masson, and Tour du Pin are given. The greater number of contributions are presented in bilingual text.

French poetry, of late, has been tending more and more towards a kind of romanticism; towards an art which sets out to express, not the social or the functional (not those qualities, that is, pertaining to the citizen or the craftsman), but the individual aspects of the artist; and in this endeavour the name of Tour du Pin deserves a high and prominent position.

Now Tour du Pin is a 'difficult' poet (one in whose world we do not find it easy to obtain our bearings or fix our points of reference); and when he expresses himself in prose, complete elucidation by no means results. Indeed, even Mr. George Fraser, who translates the present last work from the French, cannot quite succeed in imparting his own usual clarity to the poet's text.

If as a thinker, then, Tour du Pin cannot be described as readily accessible, we can at least hazard that his message is both a sincere and significant one.

Briefly, the point he appears to make is that poetry affords a process for realizing and rendering visible the unique nature of the poet's being; by which latter he understands, not that body of idiosyncrasies sometimes said to represent the individual, but what we may call the *essence of the person:* not his surface differences, but his self-distinction or identity in depth. Again, to state this in Tour du Pin's own terms, we can say that poetry is 'not primarily concerned with æsthetics', but is an unveiling or self-discovery of our own 'private mystery'; a manifestation of our own 'natural movement' whose verbal 'prolongation' creates a work of art.

Tour du Pin, then, is a personalist writer who regards his own art as a maieutic agent—a midwife to personality. There is, however, all the difference in the world between the type of romanticism, stemming from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which tended to glorify the separateness of the individual *per se*, and that romanticism of Tour du Pin 'which is engaged in contemplating man—yet not to adore him in his mystery, but to know him as a living riddle, and starting from that knowledge, to adore where we ought to adore'.

DEREK STANFORD

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